

About Public Time

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Correlations between public sphere, time and space

Public Space is under Pressure, public space is in jeopardy. Commodification, eventisation, touristification, privatisation, surveillance and control have not only significantly altered how public space is planned and managed; to a much larger degree, these changes bear long-term effects on how public space is conceived. Daily use – and particularly the unquestioned assumptions that form the basis of such use – internalise the paradigms mentioned above and regard them as self-evident.

The following essay does not address these familiar topoi of the crisis of public space (which critical urban analysis has developed) anew. On the contrary, an attempt is made to investigate the possibilities of production of the public sphere from a different perspective once more: On the one hand, this entails the topic of public time, and on the other hand the criticism of the historic dichotomy of private/public and indoor/outdoor space, respectively, that was rigorously perpetuated through the formation of public space.

Public Time

Whereas the two terms *public* and *space* are considered to be a closely-knit unity (facing concepts of urban planning, historical research, theoretical analyses, and discourse), the same cannot be said about *public* and *time*. In his study *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, art theorist Jonathan Crary delineates how technological round-the-clock availability deprives mankind of sleep. This deprivation not only affects sleeping hours, but – more importantly – the time that could be spent on the public sphere. The erosion of time prevents the individual from arguing public interests and public affairs. The time that can be mobilised for the production of the public sphere, this *public time*, is diminishing. Public time is under pressure. Public time is in crisis. This bears long-reaching social and political consequences. With the disappearance of public time, there is an equal disappearance of the public sphere as praxis. Any form of praxis requires practicing. The less time, the less practicing, the less praxis, the less public sphere. While the crisis of public space was and is much discussed, the crisis of public time has – thus far – been left without a sufficient diagnosis based on cultural theory.

Public (Indoor) Space

The historic perpetuation of the dichotomy between the private and the public passes on and prolongs – as aforementioned – the formation of public space. Such binary oppositions or dichotomies are characterised by the logic of depreciation and appreciation with which the two parts relate to one another. The Western idea of Modernism which has been analysed and deconstructed by feminism, postmodern criticism, and postcolonial criticism was caught in dichotomies or binary oppositions that regulated power relations and gender relations through inequality. Private/ public is one of those historically constructed dichotomies. Beginning with Immanuel Kant – who is quoted by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* – the public sphere has been considered the domain of the man of the world, whereas the private one belonged to the realm of the woman of the house. During the historic Age of Romanticism, this notion became more and more feminised. The real and discursive effects of the construction world-man/ house-woman were long-lasting. The real relations are always more complex, more fragile, more confusing, more ambiguous, more difficult, and more transgressive.

One of the apparent effects of the dichotomy of private/ public until today is the prevailing assumption that public space is urban outdoor space. Public indoor spaces – as, e.g., the ones in museums, libraries, universities, city halls, or parliaments – have led to theoretical and innovative single-case studies, such as Tony Bennet's key work of critical museology, *The Birth of the Museum: history, theory, politics*, which was published in 1995. As far as I am concerned, the reason for this can be found in the perpetuation of private-indoor space/ public-outdoor space.

Within the Small Circle

This is why I am attempting to establish a connection between public time and public indoor space in the following. In recent years, artistic and curatorial praxes have begun to utilise the public indoor space of art institutions for the production of public time. Events are conducted in the public indoor art space. Debates are held here. The resources of public indoor art space is not only used for exhibits, for the display of the artefacts, but – and this is, as far as I am concerned, essentially much more important – for practicing the praxis of public time. The social and the political – being dependent upon public time in order for them to be put into practice – increasingly experience space in the context of art. Within a small circle, participation in the production of the public can be exercised here, spatial forms can be found that embody this public time. Benches set up in a circle, circular seat arrangements, chairs grouped around a table – all these forms embody and symbolise the potentiality of public time.



Phoebe Giannisi and Zissis kotionis: *Kernos: One Plate for All*. The round table serves discussions, political, social and economic negotiations between positions of various agency and power. at the same time kernos is the subject of negotiations. artistic installation at the exhibition *Haushaltsmesse: The art of housekeeping and budgeting in the 21st century*, Bauhaus Dessau 2015. Photo: Alexander Schuh



The *We-Traders* Parliament was built by Zuloark in a participatory workshop one week before the opening of the exhibition directly in the Matadero. Zuloark is an architectural collective, which was actively involved in the *Campo de Cebada* from the very beginning. Photo: David sirvent, © Goethe-Institut

The two illustrations accompanying this essay demonstrate just this. The first illustration depicts a parliament that housed the We-Traders exhibition in Madrid's Matadero. The second illustration shows *Kernos*, an installation by Zissis Kotionis and Phoebe Giannisi within the scope of the Household Trade Fair at Bauhaus Dessau that was curated by Regina Bittner and myself. The parliament built of wooden benches reserved a room for the public hearing and debate in the context of the exhibition. During the time in which it was not used actively, it represented the possibility of being used, referring to its usages in the past. *Kernos* is an installation of a table that does not utilise individual plates, but offers bread, wine, honey, tobacco, olive oil, chickpeas, and raki to everyone. Around the round table, there are chairs. Visitors may be seated. On soundtracks, they can listen to conversations – in Greek, English, German, and French – that were conducted on that table about resources and distribution, about food and global budgeting. The parliament in Madrid as well as *Kernos* in one of the masters' houses in Dessau embody the significance of public time and the public effectiveness of indoor spaces that support and demonstrate this public time.

With very carefully voiced optimism, I would like to propose the following thesis: The more public time for practice, the more praxis, the more public sphere.

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